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Veteran's History Project

Howard C. Proud
Staff Sergeant, United States Army
79th Division, Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion,
314th Infantry Regiment
Served in the European Theater, France, in World War II
Prisoner of War in Ludwigsburg, Germany

Interviewed on 12 March 2003
In Mr. Proud's home, Riverside, California

Appleton: My name is Rick Appleton and today is March 12, 2003. This interview is taking place at the home of Howard Proud as part of the Riverside Veterans' History Project, a Riverside Public Library partnership with the Library of Congress.

If you could tell us your name and where you were born and raised, we'll just go from there.

Proud: O.K. My name is Howard Proud, and I was born in Aberdeen, South Dakota in 1918, October the 21 st on a farm about four-and-a-half miles north of that city where I lived until I was about eleven years of age.

Appleton: And your father was a farmer?

Proud: Dad was a farmer.

Appleton: What kind of farming?

Proud: Grain and livestock. At that time it was very unsuccessful because that's the time when no one was doing very well.

Appleton: And this would have been in what year?

Proud: About 1928, '29, '30.

Appleton: Those were tough times. How about your educational background before you joined the service.

Proud: I went to a grade school two-and-a-half miles from my house. If I remember right it was called Elmwood, and it was grades 1 through 8 and there were about seven or eight children going to school there. The school's no longer there. After that our family moved to Chicago, so I finished school in Chicago, grade school and high school. That was 1938 that I finished high school.

Appleton: Then after 1938 and high school, what did you do?

Proud: I went to work for Armour & Company as a student salesman, and left there when the war started because an opportunity came up that steel workers were in demand and the salary was much better. So I went to work at Inland Steel in South Chicago, Illinois. And with one pay check I bought a three year old used car . . . with one pay check.

Appleton: What did you do for food?

Proud: That was the increase in salary from going to the steel mill. I was a melter's helper which meant that I worked in the open hearth. Tough job. And from there I was drafted into the Army in 1942.

Appleton: In 1942. That was in June.

Proud: Yes. June.

Appleton: Before we go further than that, where were you and what do you remember about December 7 th, 1941?

Proud: That's easy. That was a Sunday and the Bears were playing football and I was listening to the Bear's football game when that came on and announced that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor.

Appleton: Right during the game?

Proud: Right during the game. They broke in to it and told us that. And I think that was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon if I'm not mistaken.

Appleton: What was the reaction of people around you?

Proud: The football game was called off. It was terrible. That's all, just terrible. Much like the Towers, you know, on September 11 th. It was just devastation just like the Towers.

Appleton: Were you living with your family at the time?

Proud: Yes. I was living on Foster Avenue in Chicago, north side out near the Edgewater Beach Hotel. A medium class neighborhood.

Appleton: So your father was not in farming anymore?

Proud: No. My father never got the job he expected to get. My sisters and brothers kept the family more or less going. My dad was around sometimes, but he'd always go back to Aberdeen. That's where he wanted to be so he would go back real often.

Appleton: So you were drafted from your job in the steel mill?

Proud: I was drafted in June of 1942.

Appleton: I assume then that you were drafted into the Army, or did you have a choice?

Proud: You know, I knew I had to go in the service. I had four sisters and my brother living in an apartment in Chicago, and then one of them would leave and then another one would leave, and we'd all stay together to help finance our home. But I knew I was going to have to go in. I can't remember what the draft exemption was, a 3A or something like that. I wanted to get in the Air Corps so I went down and took the examination for Army Air Corps, Naval Air Corps, Marine Air Corps. I went through all those and just because of some bad teeth they threw me out. They wouldn't take me.

Appleton: For what reason?

Proud: My teeth. I had a couple of decayed teeth and at that time we didn't take care of our teeth like we do now. And so the draft came up and my number was called. So I went in. The only advantage of taking those Air Corps examinations . . . or Air Corps tests . . . was the fact that when you went in the Army you got more or less of an I.Q. test for placement. It actually was an I.Q. test. They tested how well you could hear music, and so forth, and it was for a purpose. The I.Q. test was to put you where, if your intelligence was such, they could move you into something that was more responsible mentally for you. And I found that to my advantage because I tested well. When I went into the Army, if I had tested low, I'd have been a rifleman. I was an infantry man but I had a category above a rifleman and the riflemen were the guys who were on the bottom, so I got put into communications. Which meant that I was capable of the Morse Code and so forth. Now this is just my thought on how it worked, but I'm pretty sure it did work that way. So I put in for communication and I became a wireman, which was responsible for telephone wires from the battalion commander to the company commanders of the rifle company.

Appleton: So when you went in, your training, after basic training, was communications?

Proud: After basic training I was working as a wireman, laying wire and finding faults, such as shorts or open circuits, and so forth.

Appleton: Was most of the communication by wire?

Proud: No. There was a wire section in headquarters company of a Battalion, and there were also three rifle companies and a heavy weapons company in the infantry.

I was in the headquarters company and that's where the battalion commander and S-1, S-2 and S-3 officers were for intelligence.

Appleton: Where was your training mostly after basic training?

Proud: Well, I went from Chicago to Camp Grant which is just outside of Chicago. Then from Camp Grant I went to Camp Pickett, Virginia. We rode on a train and an odd incident happened on that train. They had people like Army fellas that were in charge of those trains for kitchen detail because you had your food right on the train as you were traveling from Chicago to Virginia. So we're on this train and certain guys were on KP and at the end of the trip these fellows that were the cooks that were moving about on different trains probably, took up a collection for the guys on KP duty. So afterwards one of the KP's came over and says, "How much money did you get? We didn't get any." Those guys had found a racket. But I went from there to Camp Pickett, Virginia and that's where I took my basic training.

Appleton: Was all your training in communications at Camp Pickett? Or did you train elsewhere before you were deployed. I think you said you went to Europe.

Proud: I went from Camp Pickett, Virginia to Camp Blanding, Florida. Then from Camp Blanding, Florida to Tennessee. Down in Camp Blanding it was just more of our training. We did different types of training exercises. Mostly it was the infantry that was training and we were to associate our training with their training. We were out in the woods of Florida and we got to understand the humidity down there. From there we went to maneuvers in Tennessee.

Appleton: Was that in 1942 or '43?

Proud: That was in March of '43. We were there in the wet month of March and we were always outside. In the Army you had a half tent shelter and you had a buddy and you had one blanket and he had a blanket.

Appleton: He had the other half?

Proud: He had the other half and so you'd have a buddy and you'd put your tent together and your blanket down and one blanket over you . . . real good wool blankets. Outstanding wool blankets, but one thing about them is you always had to carry them and when you're on Tennessee maneuvers, and if wool gets wet it carries an awful lot of water. So those blankets could get awful heavy on your back. When you moved into certain places in Tennessee maneuvers, you had to realize if you wanted to put your bed down in a flat space because if you didn't, you weren't in the tent in the morning when you woke up you'd rolled out or went down the side of the hill. Those were things that I remember. Tennessee maneuvers was quite a place because we did a lot of project work of laying wire and taking our jeeps up hills and down hills that we had to climb down to go down the hill so they wouldn't get away from us. We used ropes. It was quite an experience.

Appleton: Then where did you go after your Tennessee maneuvers?

Proud: We stayed in Camp Forrest, Tennessee for a short while and then we moved down to a desert training center at Camp Laguna in Yuma, Arizona. It was hotter than blazes down there.

Appleton: That's true. Were you always assigned to the same unit during your training?

Proud: Yes. Our unit stayed together from the day it was organized until it was disposed of over in Germany. (Appleton: Really?) Yes. The whole outfit. (Appleton: Then, after training?) Well, from desert training I went to Camp Phillips, Kansas in December of '43. That's near the Smokey Army Air Base. It's probably not there now. From there I went to a point of embarkation at Camp Myles Standish in Massachusetts.

Appleton: Was your military duty and occupation the same all the way through in communications?

Proud: I remained a private. A PFC is the highest rating that I received, because my company commander, who was a young fella, we never saw eye to eye on anything and I felt I was a little bit more worldly than he was. So I remained a PFC all the time I was in the states and did the same job in a seven or eight man crew we had together that was always called "the wiremen".

Appleton: And that was your military designation? A wireman? ((Proud: Yes. A wireman.) So your embarkation point was from Camp Myles Standish in Massachusetts. When were you deployed from that camp overseas?

Proud: In April of '44. That's when I arrived in England.

Appleton: It sounds like it was pretty close to D Day. (Proud: Right.) Then did you continue your training in England?

Proud: Yes. We continued doing our training. Laying telephone wire and working at night fixing shorts, then fixing the problems and so on. I have to mention that those couple of months in England were most enjoyable because there were hamlets all around us. Monday night, Tuesday night. I danced a lot when I was in Chicago, so when I was over in England, why they'd do a lot of ballroom dancing. All partner dancing, and this was really nice because these people always had a three or four piece band and they played the popular songs. So at night we'd walk to whichever hamlet had music and dancing.

Appleton: Was the reception of the people . . . ?

Proud: The English? Very good. Very good. You had to be an asinine to have them not like you.

Appleton: I can understand that. Where were you stationed in England?

Proud: In central England. Then we were moved to Wales for a short time before the invasion.

Appleton: Were you aware that you were being prepared for the Normandy campaign?

Proud: When I think about it now and I say, "Gee, Howard, you were naïve about things that were going on."

Appleton: Did you just know something big was happening?

Proud: We knew there was going to be a battle, and it wasn't much of our conversation or the reason of it or the thought like it is now. Our thoughts were not that. All I know is we were motored to . . .

Appleton: Was it southern England that you went to an embarkation point?

Proud: Yes. We were close to the English Channel. We didn't go into the invasion until about six or seven days later. The beachhead had been pretty well established. However, artillery and shells were still coming around.

Appleton: So you went in to Utah Beach?

Proud: Yes. In to Utah Beach and our unit did battle all the way from our assignment. We had smaller assignments but our real assignment was to capture Cherbourg. So they had put a date on the success of the landing and it would be related to how soon we could capture Cherbourg. Our goal at that time was to fight from where we were up the Normandy coast into Cherbourg and that was captured on June 26 th.

Appleton: Before you go any further, when you went in to Utah Beach, can you picture it in your mind and describe what you saw? What was it like?

Proud: Same as the pictures that you see up there, only they were alive. Lots of vehicles. We went in the smaller landing craft. So the person in charge of our boat said, "You know, this is different." He'd made several trips over. He says, "This is a little bit quieter now." But he took us in and he dropped us close to the sand, but we had to walk in the water. They didn't go all the way up. We got up there into a staging area and our vehicle was there and my jeep driver was there.

Appleton: By that time, had they put those temporary pontoon piers out?

Proud: They may have been there. I can't remember seeing them. But they must have been up in certain areas.

Appleton: But you had your equipment by then.

Proud: We got our equipment and our jeep and our infantry fought up the . . . I say "the coast" but we were inland a ways.

Appleton: Now you said there was an infantry squadron with your battalion, and also an armored battalion?

Proud: We were attached to many different units at that time. They were all working together. The 79 th Infantry had a division. It naturally had its artillery attachments. The same as we had our infantry and so our artillery worked with us. By that time we were in there our soldiers were fighting and as wiremen, we had to go out and find the infantry company commander who was usually a captain. And we'd find him and we'd supply him with wire communication. He had a messenger all the time with him and the messenger always had a telephone. So he carried it whether it was attached to our wire or not because the captain was responsible back to the battalion commander and he would get this communication with his battalion commander either by telephone or radio. They had two radios, the small hand held radios and the back pack radios.

Appleton: Now those didn't require wires, did they?

Proud: No. They didn't require wires. And then they had the telephone with them. And we would take the wire to them and reel it back to where the battalion commander was. So we learned to do that much faster than we did at training because we learned that we reel the wire out. At that time shells come in and tanks maneuvered and you have that wire on the side of the road, because the tanks or shells would break or short the wire. So you were always checking to see if you had communication.

Appleton: You would check the wires. Sure.

Proud: We learned real fast how to keep from going out and getting hurt. Whenever you went out with that wire you were in danger yourself of being shelled because it was a very active area. And you learned to preserve yourself by the fact that if you had a telephone wire and it had a short in it, you take one side of that wire and put it to your telephone and the other side you'd put to the ground and you could communicate through the wire and the ground, and sometimes that worked. And the other way we learned was that by ringing the telephone we knew whether it was a short or whether it was a break because with a short you got resistance and with a break you got no resistance.

Appleton: Now you were saying that on June 19 th . . .

Proud: We made our first contact with the enemy.

Appleton: This was in northern France?

Proud: In a small town called Croix Jacob.

Appleton: And by making contact with the enemy, was this with the foot soldiers and not just the artillery shells?

Proud: This was with the three 79 th Infantry Division soldiers. Then we captured Fort du Roule June 26 th. Fort du Roule overlooks Cherbourg and it had naval weapons in it. Naval guns.

Appleton: Then I assume that was successful.

Proud: That was very successful. I can't tell you how many prisoners we captured but it was up in the ten thousands. German soldiers at that time. They come out of that fort and in that fort they had all the German supplies, food, pay, money, candy, beer, Three Star Hennessy whiskey, German beer, bottled for the German officers and that was our loot.

Appleton: And your unit got a lot of this?

Proud: We got some money. I wasn't experienced in the money but I know that there was . . . I'll probably be arrested for telling you this, but . . . (Appleton: I think the statute of limitations applies here.) We got big mailbags full of money that was backed by the Bank of France. Thousands. I can't think whether they were ten thousand franc notes, a hundred thousand franc notes, but they were big. And they had that a little silver line going through them. Right after that, I gave our mail clerk the names of my sisters and brothers and my mother and told him to make me out thousand dollar money orders. Ten money orders of a hundred dollars each and he made out fifty of them for me to send back home, and some of them stood all day making out money orders. I heard that the FBI was coming over to see where they got all this money. It was breaking some of the post offices and banks back home but this did happen. It happened to us twice.

Appleton: What about the provisions? The beer and the candy and all that? Did you spread that around in your unit as well?

Proud: You know, right after that, I remember we were at this place that we called a "bivouac" and we stopped and there was no action. Even though there's no action you've still got to lay lines to your companies and keep in communication with them so we'd have to do that. At that time we had these portable hand sets that one man could use and I had this bottle of Hennessy with me and I nipped it. I know that the sergeant came out and followed the line and said, "Howard! What are you doing?" I had too much Hennessy. We had one casualty in our squad. A corporal was killed accidentally by a tank. He got too close between a building and a tank. But we never knew too much. And I have to tell you that there were many artillery shells and the German artillery was fierce. It was not like ours. Ours was a "boom". Theirs was a "crack."

Appleton: They cracked when they landed or when it hit?

Proud: When it hit. Yeah. It sounded much more explosive than our artillery. And they were called "88 Guns" and they used them for everything. And if the Germans couldn't see you, and they knew where you were, they would shoot trees so that the shells would explode on the trees and the artillery particles would come down on the ground and get you. So you had to be careful where you were and protect yourself. Some people could not tolerate the artillery and shelling. It was mind disturbing to them. They call it "shell shock". They would become shaky and nervous. By about a month after we were there, I was the sergeant in charge of the wire crew, and the sergeant who had been our sergeant was still a sergeant, but he was under me because I was in charge of the wire crew.

Appleton: So then, the stress was not as great for you as it was for other people.

Proud: I never got the shakes. There were certain fellas that you would tell them to do things and they could do it. But to go out and get close to the enemy or shells or rifle fire, they'd get all shaken and if one does it, he scares the other one and it would bother the other person. So there were certain persons in our crew who would say, "Howard, don't send me out with him. I'll go by myself. Don't send me out with him. Don't send me out with him." I was able to tolerate it and so I was put in charge of the wire crew. We had a lieutenant who was in charge of us and he put me in for a Bronze Star.

Appleton: And the Bronze Star is designated for bravery?

Proud: For outstanding duty at a certain time. I've given the award to my grandson and he treasures it and the citation of it. It was during my tour in Normandy that he recognized the fact that I was doing a yeoman's job with the wire crew, so he put me in charge of it.

Appleton: Now, did you receive other awards or citations at this time?

Proud: I didn't see my battalion commander too much except I imagine our names were passed around. While we were in Normandy, the Combat Infantry Badge was given out at that time. That's when it was made. It was a new medal. And I know he walked outside and he had one in his hand and he called me over and said, "Howard, I think you deserve one of these the mostest", and he handed me a Combat Infantry Badge. Which was very nice. It's the small things that you remember.

Appleton: Well now, the highest rank that you achieved then was sergeant?

Proud: Sergeant. That was it because that was my job. Oh, you know what? Our unit received an awful lot of awards and combat decorations. We got French ones, Croix DeGuerre.

Appleton: The Croix DeGuerre and what was the citation for?

Proud: Well, the French awarded it to the 79 th Infantry Division as a unit citation and I have one here. I recently called the French Consulate in Los Angeles and they said there was no medal, that they were citations. I think this one has my name on it.

Appleton: All right. I can't read the French but I think it says: 'For the exceptional service in the war rendered in the operation of the liberation of France.'

Proud: We received several of those.

Appleton: This was dated the 25 th of January 1945. After your unit left that part of the campaign in Normandy. After Fort du Roule and that part of the campaign, where was your unit deployed?

Proud: After that we started south towards Brest, down the peninsula.

Appleton: Now this is still in the Normandy area?

Proud: This is in that area. This is what they call the Falaise Pocket or the Falaise Gap. This was where the Germans were going to counter-attack and took a tremendous beating by the Americans. Thousands of them were taken prisoners or killed because they tried to break through. So we got down there and then we moved to the Seine River. Up above Paris at Mantes-Gassicourt. That's where we crossed the Seine River which was the first division or unit in that area. Then we sat there at this place until the French moved into Paris. I recently saw a picture of DeGaulle on Channel 2 marching into Paris with his French soldiers all in dress uniforms. Whereas the Americans were all in combat uniforms, he and his soldiers were all in dress uniforms and they went into Paris. What's that fella's name . . . the old guy? Andy Rooney. The writer who wrote over in Europe. Anyway, he had a picture on television about a week ago of DeGaulle walking in and we were sitting in Mantes-Gassicourt waiting for them to get in there so that the French could be important.

Appleton: That was an emotional time for the French, I'm sure. Did you finally then go into Paris following DeGaulle?

Proud: No. We went directly from Mantes-Gassicourt. I was with Patton's Army Tank Unit. We were supporting his tank unit. We moved up from there and went directly to Belgium. Patton could have gone wherever he wanted to go at that time, except for supplies. The supplies could not keep up with him and we had to move back because we had nobody protecting our rear or flanks. But we went so fast through there that I can still remember that one day I, a jeep driver and another one of our wire crew, and we were going down this road and about twelve Germans come out of a clump of trees. "Where's your gun?" "None of us had guns. We're wiremen. We're not riflemen." And the Germans had a white flag and they were giving up to us anyway.

Appleton: Without a gun, huh?

Proud: We had no guns whatsoever. They knew that the Americans had gone by them and they were young fellas and they wanted to know what to do and we told them what to do. We just told them to walk back because somebody would pick them up. A lot of Germans could speak English. Quite a few of them. And we just told them to go back and walk on down that road so somebody'd pick them up. Just hold onto the white flag. Nobody would bother them. But that's how fast we were moving through.

Appleton: Southern Belgium?

Proud: Yes. We got up to southern Belgium and then we had to move back and we drove all the way back to Rheims. The name of the town that we stopped at, close to the Belgium border was Sameon. Then from there we moved back to the Moselle River to Charmes. That was about September.

Appleton: September of 1944.

Proud: Right. And that was different. When we went across France we covered 180 miles in 72 hours, going across France. So you know how fast we were moving in jeeps. No Germans. No nothing.

Appleton: They had been retreating.

Proud: Or they were further up by the beach. North and there was nothing in that area. So we went that far. I imagine back here there were headlines that said we had reached Belgium already.

Appleton: Oh, I've seen the newsreel footage where the tanks and the jeeps are just racing at some point after the Normandy Campaign was successful.

Proud: We did some fighting around Rheims, probably at the north end of the French . . . let's see . . . the Germans had the Siegfried Line and the French had the Maginot Line. Or was it the French that had the Maginot Line?

Appleton: That was a World War I line, but I think they tried to re-establish it.

Proud: O.K. They had all these bunkers and we were close to that. At one time I can remember being in a certain location where our artillery guns were firing close by and we were flying across the river but I can remember being in indentations in the earth that were World War I former trenches! And that's not odd because we moved down into the southern part of the American battle area. It was close to Strasbourg. Alsace is the bottom part of the Alsace Lorraine area and we were in *Foret de Parroy* (Forest of Parroy). That was a famous World War I battle area also and it was a heavily treed area. It was a forest. And I remember being in there because our company commander was there and the riflemen were not far away because it was close to hand-to-hand combat almost and they had diggings in there and we actually located many pieces of the old German potato-masher hand grenade that were still remaining there.

Appleton: That was from World War I. It was still there.

Proud: We saw many pieces of that. Then from there, we broke out and moved all over southern France. They called that area the Vosges Mountains.

Appleton: Then at some point you engaged the German army again?

Proud: Oh, yes. We were in constant battle around Luneville. Many, many different areas. This was during the Bulge and the Germans were bluffing but they made many different battles down in southern France to keep the Americans and the allies from moving troops up to assist the Bulge. So they had to keep active down below to let the people know that there was still a battle going on. They wanted to keep us occupied and that's where we were . . . down there. In fact, they had some very good outfits down there.

Appleton: All right. The Battle of the Bulge didn't start until December.

Proud: Yes. December. We did an awful lot of fighting around that time.

Appleton: You were in the eastern part of France in the Strasbourg/Alsace Lorraine area.

Proud: Yes. Different towns. We were in Haguenau. This picture here. I was there when this picture was taken. This is a colonel. This is a guy in charge of our regiment.

Appleton: He's got his radio that he's talking on.

Proud: He's talking on a radio and my jeep is parked right off here and all of a sudden a German shell hit part of the town and he got out of there and so did we. This was close to the *Foret de Parroy.*

Appleton: At some point then your unit is overrun.

Proud: I have to show you a picture now. An Alsatian girl gives a Doughboy of Company F a glass of wine in the town of Drusenheim when the 314 th cleared the town. Well, let me show you something. This was during a break in our fighting and we were pulled back. They pulled certain units back after severe combat and we were in Luneville, France, right here in a rest area where we stayed for a while. Sometimes you'd see the Red Cross put out donuts.

Appleton: Now, after these pictures were taken, what did your unit do?

Proud: We were here, where I showed you this picture of the gal. That was the last town that I was in with my outfit. I was taken prisoner in Drusenheim, France on January 20, 1945.

Appleton: It's close to the German border, isn't it?

Proud: It is. It's the German border. It's half-German, half-French. It's under the French control and it's a historic town. I never realized this when I was there. But three years ago I went back and visited this town with my wife and nephew and his wife and they drove us. We went back to Strasbourg and took a trip up to Drusenheim. This the last place that I was very active in a battle and Drusenheim sits on a river and geographically I can't describe it too well, except for the fact that we moved in and our GI's were fighting and defending this town from windows and houses and the Germans were just across the river and they kept our outfit active. It was a very active area. Not continuous fighting but sporadic, enough so that if you stuck your nose out, you're gonna get shot at and they shelled us quite often from where, I don't know. But I know that we were there too long probably.

We used to take trips back in our jeep and this road that we went back to the next town in the rear of this, as we came into the town, the Germans used to shell us with artillery shells. We were probably playing games with them because we knew the shells were coming when we'd come down that road, so we opened that jeep up and we're going 50-60 miles an hour into our town and they no longer saw us. But the Germans crossed the Rhine River and they moved an outstanding artillery group . . . tank group . . . and they moved in to the north of us and to the south of us and they surrounded the city with these tanks. We had very little artillery support and we had no tank support and so they were able to move around and come in.

The battalion commander called us on the telephone and told us he was . . . he didn't, but somebody from the battalion commander's office or his place where he

was bivouacked or whatever you want to call it . . . they called us and said they were giving up and at that time I was in a town. I had my jeep outside and I had a couple of wiremen out checking a line and they called me and they said, “What should we do?” and I didn’t know at that time. I told them to come in. I should have told them to just take off and go back to regimental headquarters and they’d never have been captured. But the Germans moved around us and by the time we didn’t get out fast enough.

Appleton: How many were actually captured?

Proud: Our whole combat battalion.

Appleton: How many, more or less?

Proud: We’re talking about a thousand.

Appleton: A thousand. That’s close enough.

Proud: The battalion was a large group, I’ll tell you that.

Appleton: Then your unit was surrounded in Drusenheim and then what happened?

Proud: They took the whole battalion that was there, which was riflemen and parts of battalion headquarters and took us prisoners. And the German tanks moved down the streets with infantrymen and voice by voice they’d say, "*Komen sie aus."* Otherwise they’d let a shell go every so often and you didn’t have much chance with that. But we should never have gotten in that situation.

Appleton: What was the treatment that you received when they told you to come out? What happened?

Proud: You know, the Germans treated us just about the same way we treated them when we took prisoners. In other words, humanely. You’re a prisoner of war now and you mainly are sent back to wherever we’re going to keep you. So they put us all in a group and we marched from Drusenheim across the Seine River on pontoon bridges, through the Black Forest.

Appleton: Was it the Seine River or the Rhine River?

Proud: Rhine River. Across the Rhine River and into the Black Forest and into the town of Baden-Baden. On that route you wondered where the Germans got all their stuff and when we walked through the Black Forest, as you looked in the Black Forest, the Germans had boxes, cans, vehicles all stored in that Black Forest. And that Black Forest was never touched by bombs or anything else. It was all hidden in there. We were marched down the streets of Baden-Baden and it was very inactive at that time, whatever time of day it was. But it was a beautiful town.

Out of town they had a couple of barracks and we were put in those barracks for a while. We stayed a few days there and then we were marched down to the railroad station depot for Baden-Baden. This was the worst experience that I got into ‘cause I got into those old German freight cars that you see in different pictures and they put

us in that. I don't know how many of us but they closed the door and locked it and we said, "Oh, I hope no Americans . . ." We knew how active the American Air Force was over the air and we rode in that. Looking at the map, it wasn't very far because they moved us from there to Stuttgart.

Appleton: Then you were put in a more permanent camp?

Proud: We were put into a permanent prisoner of war camp. I think it was called "Stalag 13," but I'm not sure. We were moved to a prisoner of war camp at Ludwigsburg and the prisoner of war area was a part of the stables and it was all fenced in. There were nice buildings, good buildings, very secure. That's where we were kept. I know that we were well aware of the war activity because from being an infantryman you learn this for your safety, when they send an artillery shell in direct fire at you, and they're firing in your area, you see the flash and then hear the "boom." You can count to the second of where they'll land. Approximately a mile per second that's the way the sound travels, so you know how far away the artillery is that's firing. And so, when we were in the prisoner of war camp we were close enough so that we could hear the firing and see the light from the shells light up the sky, and we knew how far the allies were from our prisoner of war camp or whether they were making headway towards us.

Appleton: Before you go on from there, what date were you captured in Drusenheim?

Proud: January the 20th, 1945.

Appleton: 1945. O.K. So now you could hear the artillery?

Proud: Oh yes. You could hear the artillery and you knew what was going on. Of course our Air Force was over our area a lot of times . . . what they called P-47 planes were over, bombing and strafing. So they would come in and you could see them shelling and strafing the streets.

Appleton: By that time the American Army was advancing from the Bastogne area.

Proud: Yes. They were moving. However, while I was in the prisoner of war camp, I got pleurisy and they put me in a POW hospital where I had an English doctor and I had a bed and I was bed-ridden at that time with that. In fact they put poultices on my chest and, at that time they had sulfa drugs, and that seemed to heal. I don't know how long I was there. The Germans did what they did to all prisoners of war at that time. When the armies moved towards them, they moved the prisoners away from wherever people were coming. And they walked them and kept them. I think they did that for the purpose of saving bargaining power. So I walked from Stuttgart, Germany down close to the Bavarian Alps where I was repatriated by the Americans. A German unit went by us in the morning and about an hour later here comes the tanks and there was a short battle down the road, then all white flags. And it was a give-up by the Germans.

Appleton: When was that?

Proud: That was about April 27 th. In other words I was in there for about 100 days in the prisoner of war camp. But in that time, getting sick and so forth, I got down to bare bones. I could see my femur in my legs as I walked because that's how thin I'd gotten.

Appleton: Was it mostly from being sick?

Proud: It was partially from being sick and partially from the lack of food. The Germans didn't have food.

Appleton: Somebody had the food.

Proud: Nobody had food. They gave you bread and some sea-water soup, algae and it looked like algae. Sometimes they'd give you chicken soup that had the remnants of chicken or maybe a soybean in it and maybe a piece of meat. A sixteenth of a loaf of bread, maybe and that was brown bread.

Appleton: Was the treatment however uniformly humane?

Proud: Oh, all treatment was humane. One time we were walking through a town and there were SS troopers there with their car and some woman gave the GI's some bread or something and he walked over and gave her hell and slapped her and that was the only inhumane thing I saw. In the prisoner of war camp I did notice that the Germans did holler and yell at the French soldiers. There were French prisoners of war and I did notice the Germans did verbally abuse the French but to us there was never anything.

Appleton: Interesting. A different treatment.

Proud: While I was a prisoner we never received a full Red Cross package. They had Red Cross boxes that had Spam or chocolate, crackers and so forth, and cigarettes and we would never receive a full box or a half a box. We would receive a quarter of a box.

Appleton: The Germans had taken things out of it?

Proud: No. I don't know whether there wasn't enough or whether they weren't going to let you get fatter than they were. But we walked down to Nuremberg and that was a big, big prisoner of war camp and I got a full Red Cross box down there. I think it was a Canadian Red Cross box because each one of them was packed differently. The box was so heavy I couldn't carry it and we were marching, so I was able to snatch a baby buggy. It was on the side and we put a couple of boxes in that baby buggy but we were going to conserve food. We were so conscious of food that we didn't even get into those boxes. We would pick up snails in the swampy side of the roads where the water was and we'd pick them up and we had a can and we'd boil those snails. In the Red Cross box we had a little butter or oleo or something and we would fix those snails in our cooking can like the hobos . . . a coffee can like the hobos have. We were very conservative.

Appleton: You would eat the snails rather than the Spam?

Proud: We saved that for a later day.

Appleton: These are just amazing stories. Now, you were then repatriated in April. As you look back, what particular events stand out in your mind as being the most important?

Proud: I think probably number one was the capture of Fort du Roule. You see the big German general taking all those prisoners out of that fort we were overlooking why we were up on top of this fort. We were looking down to the town and the guns were alive and there were Germans in this fort and they were shooting at the GI's as they went in the building with these artillery pieces or light artillery. They were shooting at them. Finally the GI's were able to get into the fort and capture all the guns.

Appleton: I could see how that could be a memorable occasion.

Proud: Probably that was the most memorable. Repatriation was real nice, I'll tell you that. You know, the Americans came in and we were in a farm, bulwarked in a farm, our section of the POWs was bivouacked on a farm, hay barn. It was a dairy farm. It was a fairly nice farm. And that's where we were and the Americans came in and our guards had gone because they knew that everything was over with. Most of our guards were older people anyway. So they came in and we had to stay there until transportation was available to take us out.

This got too long so I said, "I'm sick." So I went to sick call. So they took us by truck or something to the airfield. We sat there and no planes came in the first day. While I was there we observed hundreds of jet engines at that airfield. The Germans didn't have planes to put these jet engines in but there were hundreds of them. If they'd ever had those jet engines in planes, I doubt whether we'd have won World War II because those planes would have given them air superiority just like that. I remember the first jet that I heard. I was close to the Rhine River. We were in a building or a house at the time and I thought the biggest artillery shell in the world was coming over. I went outside and it was a jet plane but it was gone. Somebody told us it was a plane and it flew over. But the Germans did have a few of them in the air.

Appleton: Do you remember the name of the airport?

Proud: No, I don't remember the airport. It was down near the Bavarian Alps. The next day they took us again in a twin engine . . . a C-47 I think it was. It came in and took us to Rheims and that was an Army hospital. So since I still had remnants of pleurisy, I still couldn't take a real deep breath without it getting there so I got to see a medical doctor. A regular GI examination. I was put in a regular room that they had all the GI's in who were more or less hurt or something. I can't remember much about it because I wasn't there too long. All I know is I was there long enough to go into a chow line. They allowed us to go to the chow line and I went down and I'm pretty sure that we had spaghetti and bread. I went through the chow line and held out my plate or canteen, whatever it was, and the guy that was serving us, put my share on the plate. I said. "Can you give me some more?" He said, "Yes." So, anyway, I ate that and I came back and said, "Can I have some more?" He looked at me. "What'd you do with the rest?" I said, "I ate it." So anyway they had a canteen at the same place so I went over and I got a Coke after that, ice cream and I went

back up to my room and I lay down and I said, “My God! I’ve overeaten. I’ve got to get off of this bed or I’ll die!” And I couldn’t even turn over. I had to put my feet out on the side and get up the easiest way I knew how and I went out in the area and walked until I walked that off. I imagine some GIs had overeaten. A GI cracker tasted like an Oreo. Sweet as an Oreo. Your taste buds were so delicate from the lack of food that a G.I. cracker would taste like an Oreo cookie. That’s the best I can describe it as.

Appleton: That could be a very memorable experience.

Proud: Then, another thing was we took a train from Rheims to the coast of France and it was called Camp Lucky Strike and that was the area where they sent troops back to the United States. They put them in troop ships and so I went back to Lucky Strike and I saw a couple of GIs that were in my outfit, but not many. My mind was not set on seeing people. My mind was set on coming back. So we got on this ship and two things I can remember happened coming back, was the fact that one of the naval officers on the ship asked for some volunteers to go down and move some food cans in the downstairs area and we, being ex-POWs, we figured that there was a treat for this so we said we would. We went down and we moved these cans and when we got through he gave us a container of ice cream and he came back in again and he says, “What’d you guys do with that ice cream?” “We ate it. You got any more?” And he couldn’t believe it.

Appleton: That was the first ice cream you had for a while.

Proud: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Your taste buds were so delicate. I can remember these guys playing poker and I think it was like the poker tournament that you see on television. There were GIs playing poker and I think that the last two poker players with all the money collected were still playing because they had an awful lot of money to play poker with.

Appleton: So then you were on the troop ship and then you returned to the United States. What month was this? Was it still 1945?

Proud: Yes. I’m pretty sure it was in June.

Appleton: Just at the time the war ended.

Proud: Just at the time I went in the Army, only three years later.

Appleton: This was the time that the war was over?

Proud: No, the war was still going on when I came back.

Appleton: Oh, it was still going on when you came back. That was in April. The surrender was in May.

Proud: Yes. The war was still going on.

Appleton: So the war finished while you were on your ship?

Proud: No. We came back to New York and we were put on troop trains. They didn't have good passenger trains. They had troop trains for us which were not very nice. Anyway we're in the city of New York and I'm with some ex-prisoners of war. Quite a few of them were. These hawkers come through the train from New York selling candy and Coke. And they set all their candy and all their Coke in between the two cars and they walked through the cars selling it to the GIs. They made a mistake because if we had prisoners of war, wherever there was food, we took it. And they came back to the middle of the car and they said, "Where's our food?" and it wasn't to be found. It was gone. Silence. Most POWs were scavengers after that. I was drafted from Chicago so they sent you back where you wanted to go and by that time I was aware of the fact that they'd give you transportation money back to your hometown so I said I'll get as far away. Riverside. So I said, "Riverside" so they sent me up here. I came across on this train to Marysville and this was about June 12 th and they gave me approximately a thirty day furlough, with orders to report back to Santa Barbara where there was an R&R area. So I took my thirty days and during that time the Germans had given up. Peace had been declared. I came back to Santa Barbara and stayed there for maybe seven days, in the rest area where I was put up in one of those hotels and dined in the café. It was a real R&R area. After leaving there, they sent me up to Camp Roberts and they were going to put us in a training unit to go to Japan. Not me boy. But they were going to train us and while there, pretty soon Japan surrendered . . . October the 12 th while I was on the list to get out.

Appleton: Yes. Well then when you think of your military career, do you see this as a worthwhile experience? How did you feel about it?

Proud: You know, I was able to take advantage of the GI Bill and I went to South Dakota State College and I was going to take pre-veterinarian.

Appleton: So then you got your degree?

Proud: Yes. I was married and between my wife and I we went to South Dakota State College under the GI Bill. From the good high school education that I had, and wasn't aware of, I didn't have to take dumbbell English. I didn't have to take dumbbell math or anything like that. I checked with the counselors to see if I was capable and they told me I didn't have a worry. So I thanked my high school education for that. I had a wife who was pregnant and I had a little girl while I was going to South Dakota State College and lived in the barracks there that they fixed up for us and I was able to finish my college in three-and-a-half years. Since I went to high school where we programmed ourselves. We did our own programming or our own scheduling. When I was in college I knew how to do that really well and so I saved courses that they taught in summer school and they were five unit courses. I saved those for summer and would take three of those and get fifteen units in the summer. So I was able to get my hundred units or whatever I needed for graduation in three-and-a-half years. Three years and two summer schools.

Appleton: Did you ever think about the war and why you were fighting? I mean was this what people talked about sometimes because obviously the United States was involved in this war against Germany led by Adolph Hitler.

Proud: I look at what people talked about and what these people prayed about and the average GI and his friends . . . this is really they're doing their duty and you do it

just like you go to work and give a person a good, honest eight hours of work. And if you don't know how to do that, you probably can be miserable being a soldier.

Appleton: I understand. Do you keep in mind or do you think about people that were most memorable from your military experience? Were there one or two people that stand out in your mind?

Proud: Oh, yes. My corporal, Frank Giska was from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was a steel worker. He was memorable because of his ability to do his job well. Very well. Better than most. I don't know what it was for a month's pay. So when we got our first paycheck, he was out there preaching to us that we were gonna get more money than probably we'd ever seen before. He turned me off right then. I mean he was so GI, uniform and all and to me, why he just turned me off but that Frank Giska is probably the most memorable person. My crewmen, the fellas that I was with, I never made contact with them after the war. I regret it very much so. I regret now that it's too late because I've tried to check and I found the best way to check them is if they ever had any VA service, they're on the VA list and I find them when I go to check. They've all passed away and, of course, I was approximately twenty-three years old when I went in the army so that means that they were all about my age.

Appleton: You mentioned your wife. You met her after . . .

Proud: I met her here in Riverside after we come back and we were married. She stayed here because I had to find a place in Brookings, South Dakota and so then she came out a little bit later and then we had only a room for a while. Then the GI barracks opened up to us at the college and we moved into a two bedroom GI barracks.

Appleton: Other than the GI Bill, did your military experience affect your job and the work that you did later? Or just help complete your education?

Proud: It just made it easy for me to complete my education. I found that the only hard part about college was the fact that I had nervousness and I was nervous about taking tests. I had sweaty palms all the time and nerves. I was that way for almost all the time of test taking. I completed my Bachelor's Degree. I had a daughter by that time. We had our little boy on the way when I graduated. These were really opportunistic for me. There was a demand for educators in the agricultural area under the GI Bill. All farmers that were ex-GIs got the same thing as I did. They got it through the GI Bill. They got on the job training on their farms and so I applied to Perris High School or I was told through the Veterans Administration or somebody that Perris had this program. RCC, I think had it. I know Perris had it and I went out and saw the principal and he introduced me to the fella that was in charge of the veterans' training and I was hired with another fellow. There were three of us and we were doing veterans training. I had the GIs in poultry because everybody was working in poultry. So through working with them, I became pretty much a poultry expert real quickly.

Appleton: Now during your whole military experience, other than your illness when you were a prisoner of war, you were not wounded?

Proud: Never wounded. One time during combat I had a feeling that my time was up, that I had lucked out and I was getting pretty shaky. I know that my lieutenant was considerate of that and in fact I told him that I was getting a little bit shaky and he did something for me. He did my duty one day, but outside of that why you'd get where your chances are up and as a soldier, you just don't get yourself in trouble. In other words, if you're going where there are shells landing, and that was our biggest thing, when you go where the shells are, protect yourself. In fact, I had a staff sergeant that was a replacement for me and we got a telephone call at night, or we got a call from headquarters that their wire was out and that E Company said their telephone wire was out. And they'd called in by radio to our company commander, and he sent the message out that their wire was out and they weren't getting communications. I'd laid the line or helped lay the telephone line so I said to Frank Giska and Giska was sleeping and this Sergeant Farmer said, "Howard, don't wake him up. I will go." And Sergeant Farmer was sitting there writing a letter. He was always writing letters to his wife. He was a real nice guy. So he and I went out to the line and it was all dark, pitch dark. I mean you couldn't even see your hand in front of you. And you followed the line to where you were going and we got there and we finally found the break in the wire. The GIs that were there, he says, "That's our artillery." And so I hooked up the line real quick and crawled back in the foxhole. I called artillery. I said, "Your shells are coming in on the GIs. It was Hell's Kitchen," and he says, "Couldn't be." And I said, "You just fired one. It just came in. And, by the way, it just killed Sergeant Farmer, deader than a doornail." Right next to me as close as you are. Closer than you are. And one of the reasons I didn't get killed was I was deeper in that slit trench than he was. It killed him instantly.

I didn't get to know him very much because he was a replacement, but I did know that he wrote letters to his wife. I got a hold of the letter that he was writing, and I wrote on the bottom of it. "Keep this and cherish it" and I put my name on it and I told Lt. Paulson, "Be sure this letter gets sent. Don't do nothing to it." Because they read them and wouldn't let you put certain things in it, and that's why I went back to France this last time. I want to find his grave because I want to find his family. I probably never will get to it because he was one hell of a good soldier! And he was so dedicated to his wife.

Appleton: And to be so close to being wounded, then to see that happen. The impact is great.

Proud: After that my company commander realized that I was doing a good job and, at that time, they were sending one GI out of each company back to the states that was chosen. And I know that I was chosen and I know that one of the fellows in our communications unit went to the company commander and said his wife is having trouble having a baby and wanted to know if he could go. Lying son-of-a-gun!

Appleton: It wasn't true, was it?

Proud: No it wasn't true and the reason I know it wasn't true is this guy right here told me that he pulled a dirty trick on me because I would've been back in the states. It's an honor of being a good soldier.

Appleton: And you wouldn't have been in Drusenheim at that time?

Proud: I wouldn't have been in Drusenheim. But I might have been over in Japan though.

Appleton: That's true. You could have been somewhere else. Were you able to maintain contact with others in your group over the years?

Proud: No. I've called one once but he was so occupied with whatever he was doing.

Appleton: Well, when you think of your whole military experiences and your military service, do you consider it a positive experience?

Proud: Very positive. You know what? Fellowship was so great! I became such buddies with these guys. We'd do anything for each other and it was always my impression that I would. There was a closeness of us but death . . . it only happened once in my section . . . no, twice. Twice. I didn't feel the first one because I didn't know that young fellow real well. He was a little bit different. In fact I think he was a replacement. The original fellows all came together as a wire crew in Camp Pickett, Virginia where we were organized. We were a pretty close group.

Appleton: Close like family.

Proud: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes. In fact one experience I can remember is that we drank a little when we were on Tennessee maneuvers and I lay down in the grass, unbeknownst to myself, and went to sleep and I know Frank Giska went up and brought two blankets down and lay down beside me so I wouldn't freeze to death. But that's the fellowship.

Appleton : Certainly. Well, this has been an excellent discussion with you and I want to thank you for participating in the project and sharing your military experiences. As you know, this interview will be reviewed. You'll receive a copy and another copy will be in the Riverside Public Library as well as in the Archives at the Library of Congress. So this concludes the interview and we appreciate your being part of it.